

HURRICANE HARVEY: Community Liaison Team – Jasper/Newton Counties – Sept. 11, 2017

Jasper/Newton CL team includes:

- David Bryan
- Jeremy Ford
- Devin Pollock
- Jim Stevens

Team will be working from EPA Houston Lab Tuesday to setup a new round of discussions with county officials and work on specific issues addressed in our concerns before returning to Jasper and Newton later in the week. Possible meetings include:

- Newton County Judge
- Jasper County Judge
- University Extension – Newton
- University Extension – Jasper

Today's actions include:

Discussion with Billy Smith, EOM for Jasper-Newton-Sabine County Local Emergency Planning Commission, was difficult today because we really haven't seen anything different. Mr. Smith did say that the Small Business Administration representative was in Jasper, Texas and talking with local bank officials.

Jasper/Newton (Mr. Smith) concerns mostly include the lack of a rural perspective -

- Debris and HHW staging/pickup - According to Curtis Carey, JFO EPA Liaison, FEMA is reimbursing county or city pickup of debris and HHW. To get local information they can check with the county or city (whoever manages their normal waste pickup). They could also call the FEMA Debris Hotline if they don't know who manages their local pickup: 855-336-2003. Mr. Smith was concerned that this would take too long and would not cover rural residences.
- The Disaster Response Centers that are being set up are a long way from Jasper and Newton counties (more than 2 hours to the nearest one) and still don't provide any rural perspective on what is needed. In May 2016, FEMA and other response agencies established a DRC in Jasper at their building. All the necessary handicapped accessibility requirements were met for that meeting so there wouldn't be too much difficulty certifying it as an acceptable building. If no DRC can be established, is there other options available.
- More than 80 percent of the counties residents have private wells and the counties do not have a plan to provide well sampling kits to residents. Other options available? We mentioned that other counties were providing private well testing and he indicated that there had been some talks with the county extension agent but he doubted that they will have that option. He indicated that private well testing will be an issue but they don't have a plan to provide them with kits. Plans are to speak to the Jasper-Newton Health Department regarding options.
- Red Cross or any other volunteer service agency does NOT have a presence in Jasper/Newton and there doesn't seem to be any intention to have services available.

EPA Team Jasper/Newton concerns –

- Printing issues – need to print copies of specific fact sheets on disinfecting homes, mold issues, etc. Printing Officers? Can there be a contract for entire Community Liaison group to allow for dissemination to all the affected counties? Currently, methods are to provide one master copy to county officials for them to print. Conversations have included having EPA CLs to staff tables at community centers but no copies are available to handout at those events.
- Need to work secondary levels beyond emergency operations to discuss needs for both rural and private citizens in the towns of the counties.
- Meeting with extension – hoping extension agencies will be able to give us a more knowledgeable thoughts on rural and agrarian needs.
- Meeting with county judge – need to obtain a municipal look on needs going forward.
- HHW and debris collection is a serious issue but there doesn't seem to be a clear answer that is getting to the affected counties.
- Frustration is starting to group when the only agency they see in Jasper is EPA letters. Need a better federal presence and a better social service presence.
- Service Center rural disconnect – know that there are more people in Houston needing assistance but shouldn't be at the expense of the rural counties.
- Role of Community Liaisons – does all requests for information regarding the response go through Jeanette or can we contact EPA Unified Command KLPs directly.
- PIO – need help getting information to rural citizens. Most likely avenues include the Beaumont Enterprise, community weeklies, Beaumont television stations, local radio. Social networks are being used but residents are just now returning to their homes and access may be an issue.

We are seeing needs but we are also seeing frustration. We believe we can put through a positive effort but need more connection with agencies and staff who can help us get things done.

And, as always, please call if you want to discuss.

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